11: Johnson NN23 Sea Islanders NN23

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[For information on the size of various St. Helena plantations under White ownership, see Category 116, pp. 41-45; for information on the historical background of the planters themselves, see Category 116, pp. 103-123.]

1: Federal W-5 (no date) 1986
NN23 Sea Islanders NN23
Georgia



789 say all his fambly in Africa could fly. I ain seen em fly muh-sef but he say he could do it all right. We's sked ub im wen we's boys an use tuh run wen we see im come."

115 During the interview Emma, Charles' wife, hovered nearby, seemingly very much interested in the proceedings. Finally we asked her to come and talk to us. Although she said that she was too young to remember much of the old times, she gave us some recollections regarding superstitions and African customs.

"Now muh gran Betty she wuz African an she plant benne seed. Once yuh staht plantin benne, yuh got tuh plant em ebry yeah aw yuh die. I tell yuh who kin tell yuh sumpm bout ole times an das Chahls Murray. He ain tell me how ole he is but I ketch he age jis duh same. Yuh go down tuh duh main road a lill way an duh road spring off tuh Chahls Murray house."

Emma also told us how to reach Ben Sullivan, one of the oldest men living on the island.

361 From Hunter's we turned left on a lane flanked by a thicket of low trees and bushes. After about two or three miles we came to a clearing where there was a scattering of houses and sheds.

115 A tall, spare man was plowing in a field to the left of the road. We hailed him and asked him if he could help us find Ben Sullivan. He left his mule and plow and came over to the car. He was tall, as straight as a soldier, with a lean agility that bespoke youthfulness. Over his long jaws and rather straight features his copper skin was smooth.

"Ise Ben Sullivan," * he said, and we were puzzled.

"But," we said, "the Ben Sullivan we are looking for is an old man."

"Ise duh only Ben Sullivan," he answered. "Ise eighty-eight."

It seemed incredible that this active, intensely alive man

* *Ben Sullivan, St. Simons Island.*

2: Jones-Jackson L-5 (1973-1986) 1987
NN23 Sea Islanders NN23
South Carolina



161 Table 3. Population Projection for Charleston County

| | 1970 | 1975 | 1980 | 1985 | 1990 | 1995 |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Edisto Island | 1,374 | 1,170 | 1,120 | 1,110 | 1,150 | 1,190 |
| James Island | 24,197 | 25,944 | 29,280 | 33,064 | 36,890 | 40,450 |
| Johns Island | 7,530 | 8,853 | 10,483 | 12,016 | 13,469 | 14,999 |
| McClellanville* | 4,094 | 3,867 | 3,814 | 3,905 | 3,994 | 4,125 |
| Wadmalaw Island | 2,024 | 1,900 | 2,150 | 2,250 | 2,450 | 2,650 |

*Source:* BCD Council of Governments *Regional Housing Market Analysis*, 1979, p. 21.
*McClellanville is not a Sea Island. It is included here because it is a coastal city that has always had a concentration of African-Americans, most of whom do speak a variety of Gullah.

563 Johns, Kiawah, and Seabrook, have undergone significant population
161 changes in the recent past (see Table 3).

## Economy

433 In the past, the Sea Islanders depended on agriculture and their
•241 natural environment for survival. Without a doubt, the new job oppor-
(178) tunities brought to some of the islands by industry and commerce will
affect this pattern. In fact, current census data indicate that farming is
already being abandoned in exchange for more lucrative livelihoods.
(464) By 1970 only 10 percent of the people on Johns Island and 15 percent
of those on Wadmalaw were farmers. The figures for farm laborers
were 13.4 percent on Johns, 20.8 percent on Wadmalaw. The Kiawah
464 Island Company painted a glowing picture of the employment oppor-
177 tunities that the resort could offer to area residents, estimating that
"operating employment for the resort would range from 476 to 511 in
1976, increase yearly to a range of 1,227 to 1,473 by 1980, and climb
to an incredible 4,034 to 4,458 jobs by 1990." Although the com-
pany's figures have proved thus far to be somewhat optimistic, the
resort development has indeed provided jobs for Sea Islanders:

> On Kiawah Island, blacks from Johns, Wadmalaw, and other areas have recently received both construction and operations jobs, although the skill levels these jobs involve are either fairly high or fairly low. Kiawah estimates, for example, that in August of 1976

2: Jones-Jackson L-5 (1973-1986) 1987
NN23 Sea Islanders NN23
South Carolina



tion, General W. T. Sherman issued his famous Field Order No. 15: "The islands from Charleston, south, the abandoned rice fields along the rivers for thirty miles back from the sea, and the country bordering the St. Johns river, Florida, are reserved and set apart for the settlement of the Negroes."[22]

From the earliest days the islanders tended to be self-sufficient agriculturally. The landowners—black or white—harvested mainly indigo and long-staple cotton, commodities that thrived well on the rich island soil. Rice, by 1724 one of the most profitable staple commodities in the mainland coastal areas,[23] was not grown to any great extent on the islands.[24]

Peter Wood writes convincingly that the West Africans were primarily responsible for the economic success of the flourishing rice crops in the Carolina territory. The cultivation, growth, and processing of rice is an old tradition in West Africa. During the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries rice was grown in most West African areas, and especially heavily near the Gambia River. In the Congo-Angola region, a white explorer once noted that rice was so plentiful that it brought no price at all. During this period West Africans actually sold rice to the slave traders to stock their ships.[25]

Unlike the Europeans, then, who knew little about rice, the transplanted Africans were widely familiar with its cultivation. In fact, rice was so important a part of African culture that its growth and harvest were celebrated each year, just as the growing of yams was celebrated in "yam festivals."[26] In West Africa today there is still a kind of symbolism associated with rice and yams: they are much more than just food to be consumed.[27] Rice continues to be a primary food in both West Africa and the Sea Islands, and its preparation and offering tend to be expressions of fine taste and "good eating."[28]

Until recent years the primary Sea Island commodity was long-staple cotton, a crop that thrives only in light, sandy, saltwater lands. Because of its fine silky texture, it brought excellent prices on the world market, and it was grown along the Atlantic coast from the Santee River of South Carolina to the Florida Everglades.[29] The rapid expansion of cotton production on the islands, as elsewhere, was a major factor in the great demand for West African slaves to work the fields. Perhaps because cotton was a crop new to the slaves, or because the growth and harvest of an inedible crop did not offer the familiar gratification associated with rice, or merely because of the connection

2: Jones-Jackson L-5 (1973-1986) 1987
NN23 Sea Islanders NN23
South Carolina



248 with slavery, the mention of cotton in Sea Island folklore and literature generally has negative connotations.

243 248 Today neither cotton nor rice is grown to any extent on or around the Sea Islands. Rice was gradually eliminated by the many disastrous floods and storms which frequent the Carolina coast. Cotton was abandoned in favor of more lucrative means of support, especially since the cotton-picking machine eliminated the need for harvesting of cotton by hand. The primary crops now are edible produce, including soybeans, peas, okra, tomatoes, corn, peanuts, and watermelons, and many folk narratives focus on the planting, cultivation, and harvesting of these crops.

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226 262 Another major food source is fish, shrimp, crabs, oysters, mussels, clams, lobsters, conchs, and sharks, all of which the islanders prepare expertly and variously. Fish has always been important in the local diet. Consider, for example, a resident minister's account of the varieties available around Edisto Island in 1800:

[136] The creeks, rivers, and seas which indent and surround the island furnish at different and appropriate seasons of the year, a great variety of excellent fish—as the larger drum, the small black drum,. bass, rock-fish, sheephead, cavallie, bonnetta, salmon-trout, yellowtail, ale-wife, croaker, plaice, flounder, skate, pike, shad, and catfish, and many others, suitable for the table. Porpoise and sharks frequent the creeks and surrounding waters. Some of the latter are seen and caught of an enormous size. They are considered as just objects of terror by the negroes. And yet, although the fishermen continue hours together waist deep in water, and have often the misfortune of hooking them, they escape with impunity.[30]

226 [868] Crabbing and fishing are so much a part of Sea Island culture that many children learn the fine art of casting and netting as early as three years old. Some residents who earn their livings from fishing practice an old African method of netting fish in mass. An elderly gentleman explained to me that his grandfather had taught him to beat on the sides of his boat to attract fish and porpoises to the area (see Appendix 1). A The porpoises scare schools of fish ahead of them, and the fish are then caught in the nets. In a variant of this method, a group of fishermen will wade out into the water to beat on their drums or other instruments. The more noise they create above and below water, the more

A, [For Appendix 1, see Category 226, pp. 151-155--Analyst]

41 Carawan & Carawan B,Z-5 (1959-1988) 1989
NN23 Sea Islanders NN23
South Carolina
Johns Island

159 good deal. He founded the Committee on Better
(668) Racial Assurance (COBRA), a multi-issue community organization in Charleston also serving the sea islands. He has been chairman of the Charleston County Democratic party. He ran for state senate and received support in both the black and white communities. He is the owner of WPAL, a vital radio station in Charleston that consistently addresses social issues as well as responds to the musical tastes of the community. He was the principal mediator in the major civil rights campaign of the Charleston area—a strike of hospital workers in the late 1960s.

464 The job situation on Johns Island has improved slightly. In the 1960s all young people who
(489) finished high school left the area to find work. Now, with improved transportation, it is possible for them to work in Charleston and still live on the
• (241) island. The resort developments and the new small
078 businesses offer some employment, but farming, long a mainstay in the island economy, is steadily
311 declining. Farmland is now the prime target of de-
433 velopers. But the people who have stayed on Johns Island have held onto a firm determination to live in their traditional community, and many of their hopes and dreams are still in place.

179 Development on Johns Island has taken two
199 forms. Tourist development, spreading rapidly all along the coastal islands south of Washington, D.C., is a threat to the indigenous population on Johns Island. Kiawah and Seabrook, accessible only by driving across Johns Island, are full-fledged resort communities with condominiums, hotels and inns, shops and boutiques, and large private homes. Both are entered by passing through a security checkpoint. Viewed initially as offering some economic and social benefits to island residents, both have been disappointing, catering to wealthy visitors from outside the region and offering only menial and limited employment. Wadmalaw Island, just across the Esau Jenkins Memorial Bridge from Johns Island, is in the throws of plans for development. An island committee made up of black and white landowners has been meeting regularly to design their own development plan that may

(P XIII, B)

4: Carawan & Carawan B,Z-5 (1959-1988) 1989
NN23 Sea Islanders NN23
South Carolina
Johns Island

*Rev. G. C. Brown*

## THOSE WERE ROUGH DAYS

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My wife and I've been here since '36. No pastor had lived here the last forty years before we came. And of course by not living with the people, they couldn't know their need and their desire. They wanted somebody to come and live with the people—that's why we came.

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The first thing I found here was extreme poverty. That was during the days of the Depression, and there was no work except the WPA project. That white schoolhouse out there was built as a WPA project. The men on the farms were working for seven cents an hour. Oh yeah, seven cents. And the women, five cents.

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The men plowed; the women did all the farm work. That time they didn't have planters to plant the potatoes. They cut the potatoes, dropped them in the field, and the men did all the work with the plows. That give pretty good farm employment. You had a number of men running plows, the women go along and drop the potatoes, and that give them a good day's work—several days' work in springtime. That give them employment during the planting season.

And the cabbage plant out by hand. Nowadays some have a planter. Some children worked then, but they didn't have too many children that time. There hadn't been so much marrying and going on.

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(262)
(243)

Those were rough days. Food was short, scarce, didn't have much. The most they ate those days, they ate rice, grits and canned tomatoes. They bought their tomatoes at the store. They were cheap then. They bought the grits. Some made their own grits. They had a few mill. And they used to raise their own rice. There were a lot of rice farms around. They had a way of cleaning it and milling it.

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Most of 'em were poor. Had no income. Very little income. They lived out of the creek. In the summertime they had crabs and shrimp, and in the wintertime had oysters. You could buy right at your door about three times a week, undressed shrimp—five cents a plate. In the wintertime we buy

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41 Carawan & Carawan B,2-5 (1959-1988) 1989
NN23 Sea Islanders NN23
South Carolina
Johns Island

722 power, see? That's when the farming situation changed; they built these roads, and they began to produce more food for defense. White farmers. Negroes have come to tractors in later years, after they got on their feet. But they h-ve small farms. No comparison with white farms.

[177] [241] [423] There weren't too many white people here then, but they owned most of the land and they had the farms. The Negroes were little farmers. Many of them had their own lots, but weren't able to build a house. World War II came, they were able to make some money and they moved off the farms and built little homes.

464 More people work in the city now. Nothing here to do except a few farmers to work for. Few women have employment on the farm. They work in the city as domestics. You find a few on the farm here and there. In the springtime they take trucks around and pick up the hands for the day.

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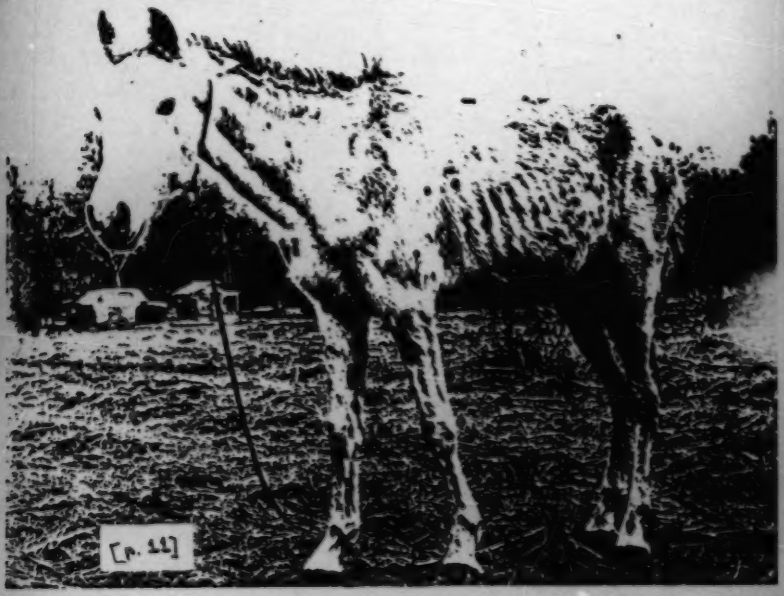

[p. 11]

4: Caravan & Caravan B,2-5 (1959-1988) 1989
NN23 Sea Islanders NN23
South Carolina
Johns Island

*Mrs. Alice Wine*

## WE DO EVERYTHING FOR WESELF

159 935 241 Old times we never buy food. Man, you never used to buy nothing that time. Money use to never worry people but pay church and buy little things what you want or something like that. People raise the apple, they raise the fig tree, raise the plum, all kind of different thing. But now you got to see money. Money! You got to go for make money to buy. Is harder now. You got to work so hard to get a little bit of money. In that time you could get a quart of grits for two cents. (435)

My daddy farm for heself. He raise he own food. We raise all vegetables. Something to keep in the barn in the winter. He plant corn, plant peas. He have sons plow. I do some too. And after we do all that, then they harvest 'em there in the barn. Then you ain't have to work in the winter.

(443) (438) (231) Them times just a couple of stores, but you have to walk over seven miles to it. They sell food, but when you can plant your own, you make your own living. We have plenty chicken and have eggs and have plenty cows and have the milk. And my mother made butter—we own butter. Have we own churn and everything. Do everything for weself. So we never buy.

(251) Those times people raise the tomatoes and the okra and can it. And they do that right now. They can it, they fix the bean, they dry the beans and the peas. They cut up the okra and they dry that.

159 935 (438) (388) (252) (250) (222) My mother didn't never buy no kind of food. They make soap. They make plenty soap. But what they make it out, I don't know. They grind corn and make flour and grits. And we have the mortar and beat the rice. And meat, we kill the hog and put 'em in salt. End of the year, they put up hog. Kill the cow and have beef meat.

Daddy go in the creek and get we tub of fish—plenty fish that time. Get the fish out the creek—oshters, crab, mushel. Then we use to get them cookies five for a penny. Now cost penny a piece.

(294) For clothes my daddy and mother they buy the cloth and make it. My mother had a machine and he do all his sewing.

4: Carawan & Carawan B,Z-5 (1959-1988) 1989
NN23 Sea Islanders NN23
South Carolina
Johns Island

*Mrs. Janie Hunter*

## ASH CAKE IS SOMETHING YOU BAKE IN THE CHIMBLEY

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Way back yonder the old lady and them had some hard times. Had to take water out the creek to cook with. They'd cook ash cake. Ash cake is something you bake in the chimbley—in the fire hearth. You have the fire hot and burn down to ashes. You mix the corn meal and you open the ashes and place the corn meal in the ashes. You haul the coals on it, and it come to a brown. After you take 'em off the hearth, you wash 'em in something call dishpan and you put it on the table and let it cold. Cut it open with the knife, and you call that ash cake.

735 292

In the old time you couldn't afford to buy coffee or tea. We'd take the corn off the cob, break the corn off the stalk and put it in the chimbley hearth and let it burn. You have a pot of water on the fire, and when the corn burn you drop it in the pot and that turn coffee. You drink that along with ash cake. For tea, you take grits and put a frying pan on the fire, let the grits parch 'til brown. Then you pour water in the pan and that turn tea. Call 'em grits tea.

735 198

Yeah boy, we come through a great tribulation. But there's freedom now. You can get anything you want if you got the money.

*Mr. Willie Hunter*

## WE SEE MEAT, BUT WE DON'T GET IT

735 159 262 [241]

My aunty raised me from a little baby, 'cause I ain't know my mother, neither father. He raise me up on his farm, was plant cotton, and peas, potatoes, and all. For dinner we eat peas and some corn grits, little sweet potato, and drink some water. And after that we go back in the field, pick some more cotton, dig some more 'tato. We see meat, but we don't get it. They had little meat in the soup, you know, boil with the peas or turnip, and cook with some meat in it, but you don't get none for we children, 'cause wouldn't have that much meat for give we, understand?

4: Carawan & Carawan B,Z-5 (1959-1988) 1989
NN23 Sea Islanders NN23
South Carolina
Johns Island

*Mrs. Betsy Pinckney*

## YOU GOT TO WORK LIKE THE DEVIL

159 46 ● 241 Oh Jesus, that hoe! When I married to Josh, I couldn't lift the ground. Didn't know nothing 'bout lift ground. Josh, he work in the field. Milk the cow, then plow, man, plow. Sometime he dig the bed so wide if you reach your hoe, you better have a good long hoe stick.

(429) (492) We used to work for our rent and our food. You got to work like the Devil! Plant your cotton. Plant your corn. You have to work five task for that land and that house. Take oxen and plow. You have to work that 'fore you work your crop. That's you house. That's the rent. If he calls every week, you'll have to go.

159 (412) In 1918 we move to our own place, where I am now. Josh go in the road and cut all them bush. Work with the ax and hoe. Some people carry the ax, some carry the hoe. Chop them bush. Cleared out the way for the cart and buggy come down. Then we had a crowd of children in there. And we had 'tato. When you throw 'em on the ground, just like somebody throwing dice on the floor. I had eleven head of children. And every one of my children had children. With the grands and the great-grands I have a hundred and forty-odd.

*Mr. Willie Hunter*

## WE RAISE GOOD THAT TIME

I was raised right around here. Know the Bligens long before I ever marry they daughter. I know Bligen long time. My wife. All nice people. If they weren't nice people, I don't go in their family, I be in some other family. Nice people, man.

159 597 They like me too. 'Cause I have plenty manners to them. Course I raise up that way, 'cause I raise up through the old school. Plenty manners. You had to have manners to them old people that time, 'cause in that time anybody could of lick you, you been sassy with any people. But now, we don't do that.

159 See if anybody lick me, outside my aunt what raise me, if I go home and tell Auntie that somebody lick me, I get some *more* lick. The best thing I do, keep my mouth shut and take what I get. Oh we raise good that time. Now things changed a whole lot. But I try to raise my children like I was raised.

4: Carawan & Carawan B,Z-5 (1959-1988) 1989
NN23 Sea Islanders NN23
South Carolina
Johns Island

159 he teach me how to paddle a boat. After he died, I took it up myself. I did
226 the same thing: go in the river and catch some fish and sell it. Most of it is mullet fish, mullet and spots, and some catfish, all different kinds. Cast net. Run from three to four feet deep to maybe sometimes seven to eight feet deep. I go by myself or with my brother.

159 I began to do some carpenter work too. I was working along with a
(335) carpenter, and after a time I began to learn how to do some of the work for myself. So I finally try alone, and I made it all right. I do my own work now.
(464) I'm working at a block and pipe company--making door lintels and window lintels, all different kinds of stone.

(434) The best kind of money people can make is on electricity works and chanical works and maybe expert carpenters and bricklayers. Harvesting
(241) season in the fall, you can't make much because it's only about three or four weeks long. You can do all right for those three or four weeks. You can make it anyhow. But 'round May and June, that's about the best months of the year on the farm. October you start having maybe some string beans. Then you sit 'til next year in May and June.

*Mr. Benjamin Bligen*

## MORE LIGHT IS SHINING

I am forty. The look of the pudding is not the taste all the time. I have two children. I have a better time raising mine than my parents had raising us. Foods went up a lot, but still you can make it a little better now than you is in past time.

More light is shining. Can see more. Likewise you can do more and think more, 'cause I believe that more light is shining now than was shining in the past. And so help me God, I so glad that I can see some light. And I know there's more light for me. There is a bright light somewhere and I'm going to find it.

4: Carawan & Carawan B,Z-5 (1959-1988) 1989
NN23 Sea Islanders NN23
South Carolina
Johns Island

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4: Carawan & Carawan B,Z-5 (1959-1988) 1989
NN23 Sea Islanders NN23
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159 893 I was able to have my children educated. One son is a captain in the Army, one a navigator in the Air Force, two daughters are teaching, one son is a professor of music.

And now there are other folks on this island being encouraged to send their children to get a higher education. We know that some day in the near future Johns Island will be a better place to live.

*Rev. C. C. Brown*

159 185 893 **ESAU STARTED THE MOVEMENT, WITH HIS OWN CHILDREN IN A LITTLE TRUCK**

When I came here thirty years ago, there was no chance for any schooling beyond the fifth and sixth grade. Esau started the movement by going into Charleston, with his own children in a little truck, taking them to Burke High School.

Then the County eventually consented to pay the tuition at Burke for all who graduated the eighth grade here. And the load kept increasing as the nine little schools on the island educated a group every spring. So they decided it would be better to go ahead and build a school over here with the people, and consolidate rather than to pay this tremendous tuition cost and transportation to Charleston. And that's how Haut Gap High School came to be here.

Esau started it. He's the originator of it. They might not give him credit for getting that school built, but I know 'cause I was here.

*Mr. Esau Jenkins*

159 **IT'S GOOD TO DO YOUR OWN FIGURING**

465 241 I shall never forget those days when I have worked long on the farm—for fifty cents a day—plowed, lined out straight rows to spread fertilizer in, and come back and put the potatoes in the trench and cover it up.

At that time I was about eighteen or twenty years old. I married when I was seventeen, and because I felt like that wasn't any kind of money to support a family with, I left and went to work somewhat for myself.

My father was a farmer and a carpenter. He was doing carpenter work when he was much younger, and he tried to teach me how to do it. I worked with him for a while, but I didn't like carpenter work too well. I imagine I

4: Carawan & Carawan B,Z-5 (1959-1988) 1989
NN23 Sea Islanders NN23
South Carolina
Johns Island

159 was a little bit lazy, that kind of thing. But my father was very smart in carpentry. He built a house in a few days if you just give him the material. But then as he got older he turned more to farming.

159 197 803 My father was a man believe in whatever the white folks said. He didn't want to hurt them a bit. I know after I start farming with him, one day we went to carry some cotton to sell. The white man who figured what the cotton come to, he gave us a certain price. I started to figure mine.

Daddy told me, "Don't do that. The white folks never like that, Son."

I say, "Well, I'm not figuring for the white folks at this point, I'm figuring for my own benefit."

Well, he never figured, but I figured mine. Unfortunately, mine was wrong when the white man figured, but I wouldn't take it. I waited until everybody got the money, including my daddy, and I went to him. "According to what you paid me, my money didn't come to what it should come to for the amount of cotton I had."

So he said, "Well, let me see." Sure enough, he found out that he made a mistake.

But now if I said that before everybody, there might have been everybody who was there think that his own was wrong too. And everything might have been, but I *know* mine was wrong. And I certainly glad I was able to figure.

I told my daddy, say "Now Daddy, you see I don't know how long this man doing it, but this figuring was wrong, and I don't know how many other person was wrong, but I didn't say it because I was afraid that everybody would say the same thing, and then he would blame me for it. But can't you see it's good to do your own figuring?"

Of course, I convince him at that time, but he never would do it.

159 *Mr. Esau Jenkins*

## THEN I NOTICE THE GREEKS

(248) (241) I planted cotton for about four, five years--my father and I together. It takes one whole year to harvest cotton. Then my mind tell me to start with vegetables. Then most of the people start on vegetable farming--truck crop farming, where you can plant three vegetables a year, no doubt four. That's what prompt me to buy a truck.

159 177 432 Then I notice as I go into the city to sell my vegetables, most of the stores are operated by Greeks. They buy all kind of vegetables. So I thought the best thing for me to do then is to try to learn the Greeks' language. I could sell more stuff and help me to do more business and help my family better. So I went and took Greek. I took Greek for about a year and a half

10: Johnson S-4,5 (no date) 1930
NN23 Sea Islanders NN23
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beliefs of the Southern Negroes as a whole. Indeed, they have actually ceased to take seriously many of the old-time superstitions because of the influence which Penn School has had. Undoubtedly there are still some people who patronize "root doctors" or "cunjuh men" in order to procure charms of various sorts and to get "spells" or "voodoo" put on their enemies. There are also some who actually use the folk remedies for various ills, and there are some who plant crops and kill hogs according to lunar phases. But the general status of the island culture as far as superstition is concerned is not very far below the level of the more backward white groups in this country. A surprisingly large proportion of the Negro folk beliefs found in the South is of European descent, and this holds true for the beliefs of the St. Helena Island Negroes.

Following are some of the traditional folk beliefs which seem to be actually practiced to some extent. Midwives, without the patient's knowledge, sometimes put a hoe or plow point or an ax under the bed to cut the after-pains attending child-birth. It is also thought that if the patient will drink tea made from gizzard which has been dried and powdered, or tea made from the nest of the mud dauber, the after-pains will be reduced. Most families try to pay the midwife promptly for her services, for it is believed that failure to pay may cause her eyes, or even her mind, to be affected. Sometimes a Bible or a broom may be seen lying on the pillow above the head of a sick person. This is supposed to prevent the spirits from taking the person away. Mrs. King, the community nurse, stated that she has occasionally had to combat the use of such remedies as cow excreta and vinegar heated for boils,

11: Johnson H-4,5 (no date) 1930
(1525-ca. 1880)
NN23 Sea Islanders NN23
South Carolina
St. Helena Island

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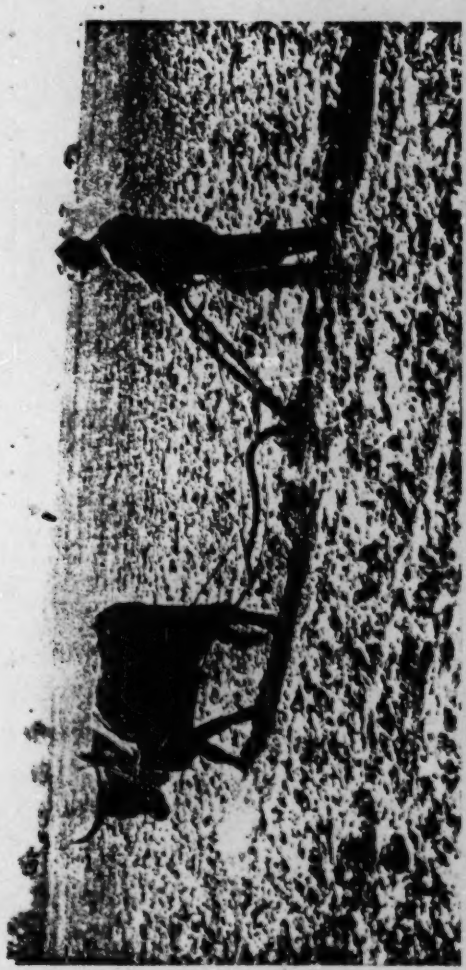

SPRING PLOWING

[facing p. iii]

11: Johnson H-4,5 (no date) 1930
(1525-ca. 1880)
NN23 Sea Islanders NN23
South Carolina
St. Helena Island

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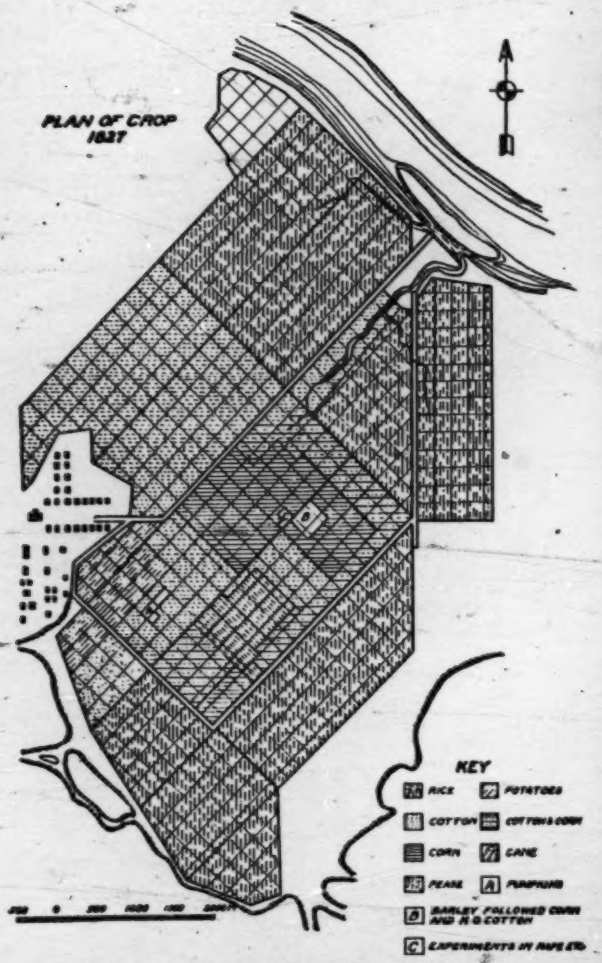


HOPETON PLANTATION ON THE ALTAMAHA

[D.63]

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The basis of work on a sea-island cotton plantation was the task. In time the term came to signify a quarter of an acre laid out 105 by 105 feet. The acre was laid out square, 210 by 210 feet. A day's work for a full hand depended upon the time of year and the kind of work he was doing. When listing, the full hand's task was a quarter of an acre. Listing was the first process of preparing the land for cotton after the field had been manured, and consisted of hoeing the grass off the old bed into the alleys. Next the old beds were hauled on top at the rate of a quarter of an acre a day to the full hand. When a plow was used, as it seldom was, the hands followed with hoes, finishing off the beds at the rate of three tasks a day, or three-fourths of an acre. A plowman's allotment was usually four tasks, or an acre a day.

When the bed had been made, two hands made holes the width of the hoe cross-wise on the top of it at intervals of about eighteen inches. Another hand followed, scattering ten or fifteen seeds in each hole, while two other hands covered them to a depth of about an inch and a half, patting the soil down. Since this was light work the day's assignment in this process was usually three tasks.

A day's work at hoeing after the cotton came up was ordinarily two tasks. Picking, which was done generally by the women and children, was accomplished at the rate of about ninety to a hundred pounds a day for a full hand. The task at assorting was from thirty to fifty pounds of seed cotton a day, at ginning from twenty to thirty pounds a day, at moting from thirty to fifty pounds a day.

The tasks involved in plantation work as laid down

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for Weehaw plantation near Georgetown, which were also observed on St. Helena plantations, were as follows:[21]

Corn: Sowing done in gang. Covering done in gang.
Hoeing ¼ acre Hauling up ½ acre.
Plowing corn 2½ to 3 acres; a man & mule will tend 30 acres. Stripping fodder ¾ acre on first day—after that strip 1 acre & carry home that of the previous day.

Potatoes & Slips:
Planting—3 [hands] in a ¼ acre, who also bed it up.
Hoeing—2 in a ¼ acre. Hauling up 20 Compass.[22]
Digging slips—men, 5 rows—Women, 4 rows & carry home.
Digging roots for allowance—5 to 7 rows, as they bear.
Weeding is usually done by the shufflers.[23]

Peas: 3 hands to 3 acres when planted between corn.
Harvesting—2 large blankets.

Ditching . . . 6 to 8 tasks. Spreading straw[24]—if wet ½ acre. if dry ¾ acre. Listing in straw—½ acre.

Getting task stakes, 500 to a hand[25]

Splitting Rails—100 Rails 12 ft long & heavy

Cutting Wood—1 cord. . . .

Splitting garden railings—500 to 3 men. . . .

Cutting down & piling up corn stalks, 1 to 1¼ to 1½ acres.

Digging ditches . . . —600 cubic feet.

The tasks at cutting marsh grass and digging marsh mud for fertilizing the fields were estimated by the cart load and varied with the weather and the distance of the marsh from the field.

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[21] Henry A. Middleton, Jr., Weehaw Plantation Book.
[22] A compass was five feet as measured by a wooden triangle called a compass.
[23] Children or superannuated men and women.
[24] On St. Helena plantations marsh grass was used instead of the rice straw spread on the Weehaw fields.
[25] Each hand's task was staked off.

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plantations in 1862, reported that Thomas A. Coffin gave his 250 slaves twelve beeves in summer and four at Christmas, four barrels of molasses in summer, and from April to June, when work was heavy, two pecks of corn and two and a half pounds of bacon per slave.[28] He also regularly gave every hand a quart of salt a month and every man two "hands" of tobacco a month and four "hands" at Christmas.

In addition to the rations issued by the master, the slave might gather from the plantation creeks and rivers all the oysters and crabs which he desired. The practice in regard to the fish varied with the plantations, as will be indicated later.[29] Each family was also given a small patch of ground, about one task, back of the cabin to cultivate as desired. Most families planted three or four rows of corn and put the rest in potatoes. They ate part of the corn, but fed most of it to the pig and chickens which each hand was permitted to keep. Some planters on St. Helena even permitted their Negroes to have cattle. Nor did the hands usually eat their stock and poultry, but sold it to the master or to the island storekeeper or to merchants in Beaufort.

When Captain Basil Hall visited a plantation on St. Simon's Island in 1828, he found that the master's family was supplied entirely with poultry and eggs by his Negroes at these prices: eggs, 12½ cents a dozen; chickens, 12½ cents each; fowls, 20 to 25 cents each; ducks, 50 cents each.[30] They were given the liberty to carry their produce to a better market if they could find one. With

[28] MS in Port Royal Correspondence. In Archives of U. S. Treasury Department.
[29] *Infra*, p. 142.
[30] Hall, *Travels in North America*, II, 232.

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to dispose of eggs, coopers' wares and canoes, but required that they be home by twelve o'clock unless by special permission.[35] When it became illegal for a slave to hold personal property, the master, overseer, storekeeper, and slave all found ample means of evading the law as the cases arising on this statute indicate. Masters often paid their people for extra work done on the plantation, such as, gathering corn blades for fodder or collecting rice straw. Miss Mary B. Elliott, of Beaufort, gave her slaves 5 cents a pound for blades.[36] The master also gave them presents of money, especially at Christmas or New Year.

By thus being permitted to possess personal property of his own, the slave felt his condition to be less abject. Some planters tried to help their people to accumulate more than they could ordinarily obtain through the sale of "nigger truck" so that they might have some degree of independence. James Hamilton Couper set apart a field for the benefit of twenty-five picked men and allowed them half of their Saturday's labor in which to work it. He required all to work faithfully in the common field during the first year, and at the end of that time divided the $1,500 arising from the sale of the crop equally among them. But when they were left to work the field as they chose, they did very little and at the end of two years abandoned it entirely.[37]

While some slaves wisely spent their money for comforts which the master did not provide, others laid out their pittances in indulgences: liquor, tobacco, and fancy

[35] "On the Management of the Butler Estate," *Southern Agriculturist*, Dec., 1828.

[36] Elliott Account Book.

[37] Lyell, *Second Visit to the United States*, I, 268.

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themselves in despair upon the ground, while on other plantations where the news had leaked out, the men took to the woods and the marshes, and had to be hunted down by the soldiers.[27]

In June, 1862, the "experiment" was transferred from the Treasury to the War Department, and Brigadier-General Rufus Saxton placed in command with instructions to take possession of abandoned plantations and to make rules and regulations for the cultivation of the land.[28] Pierce was offered a place on his staff with the rank of colonel, but forseeing, no doubt, that the plan of the experiment was soon to be altered, he declined the appointment. General Saxton was, from the first, sympathetic with the Negro and honestly attempted to carry out the spirit of Pierce's plan, but he was constantly annoyed and prevented from doing so by those who were not.

General Saxton inherited the confusion which Pierce had found harmful to the successful cultivation of the plantations and which in his brief command he was unable to overcome. The superintendents at once besieged him with requests to make some change in the plan of management before another planting season, but he was slow to take up the matter. In the autumn Charles P. Ware, in despair, wrote to a friend, "We need people at headquarters who understand the details of plantation work. . . . There is a general want of concerted system on all the places. Each superintendent has to do as he thinks best in all cases himself. General plans are usually determined on just too late."[29] It was more imperative than

[27] *Official Records*, ser. III, vol. II, serial no. 123, pp. 52-60.
[28] *Ibid.*, pp. 27, 152, 153.
[29] *Letters from Port Royal*, p. 93.

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ever that some scheme of management be hit upon which would make the plantations pay for themselves, for Congress showed no disposition to help the experiment along by an appropriation and the cotton fund, the amount realized from the sale of the crop of 1861, was getting low.[30]

Early in November General Saxton called a meeting of superintendents to consider plans for the coming year. Edward S. Philbrick, superintendent of Coffin's Point plantation, advocated an almost complete overthrow of the old plantation system. He would divide the plantations among the people, allotting the Negro families as much land as they could cultivate, paying them upon the basis of what they raised. This plan the government finally accepted for the crop of 1863. The plantations still under Government supervision were divided into plots and rented without charge to the plantation families, the land being apportioned at the rate of two acres for every working hand and five-sixteenths of an acre for every child. If they refused to raise cotton, they were compelled to pay a rent of not more than $2 a month. In addition, the Government supplied the implements and seeds and paid 25 cents for a day's work, usually the amount of work performed by task under the master.[31]

Saxton now divided the territory under his supervision into three areas and appointed a general superintendent over each. The local superintendents in charge of plantations were answerable to their respective general superintendents.[32]

[30] *Letters from Port Royal*, p. 115.

[31] Pierce, *Addresses and Papers*, p. 116. Pierce had approved of this plan in his "Second Report," p. 319.

[32] *Official Records*, ser. III, vol. IV, serial 125, pp. 1023, 1024.

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### THE NEGRO AS A LANDOWNER

175 423 The opportunity to buy land of their own created the first real excitement among the Negroes which had occurred since "gun shoot." They were all astir trying to stake out claims and then trying to get their claims considered by the commissioners. They had the money which 175 they had earned as plantation hands for the Government 423 and as laborers at the camps with which to meet the pur- 434 chase price. Besides, many of them had sold fish, chickens, and garden truck to the superintendents and the soldiers. W. C. Gannett estimated in 1863 that a driver on one of the St. Helena plantations had made four or five hundred dollars since the Federal occupation. "He is all ready to buy land," he wrote, "and I expect to see him in ten years a tolerably rich man."[87] Many Negroes who did [476] not have sufficient funds to buy tracts of the size they desired organized clubs and bought land in this way.[88]

175 423 Whenever it was possible the Negroes chose to purchase land on the plantations where they had been born. In staking out their claims they invariably moved their cabin in the "street" to the new plots of land, and started life as landholding citizens on the very ground which they had cultivated as slaves. Thus the transition from slavery to freedom scarcely interrupted the daily routine. Now they had freedom of movement, but with it [434] had come the responsibility of earning their own living, [241] and the only method open to most of them was the cultivation of their little tracts after the manner learned in slavery.

[87] *Letters from Port Royal*, p. 370.
[88] *Beaufort Republican*, May 30, 1872.